

**Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission  
Turners Falls, Massachusetts  
Meeting Minutes  
January 21, 2005**

**Agenda Items:**

**1. Determination of Quorum, Approval of Today's Agenda & Minutes of the November 19, 2004 Meeting**

Vice Chair Wayne MacCallum, acting as Chair, in Mr. Ed Parker's absence, called the meeting to order at 10:25 a.m.

Mr. Steve Gephard sat in for Connecticut since both the Chair and his alternate were unable to attend the meeting. The National Marine Fisheries Commissioner was absent.

Mr. Tom Menard made a motion to approve the agenda as written and the Minutes from the previous meeting. Mr. Scott Decker seconded the motion and these were both approved unanimously.

Mr. MacCallum welcomed the meetings attendees who were each called to introduce themselves.

**2. Report of the Executive Assistant**

Ms. Janice Rowan provided the following report:

Mr. Bob Jones drafted a letter to the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supporting the Regional efforts to resolve the Fisheries budget deficit. The letter was finalized and signed by all Commissioners excepting the USFWS and NMFS Commissioners. The letter was sent to the Director on December 7, 2004 with copies to the entire basin legislative delegation. Other letters of support were also sent to the Director by a New England legislative delegation and the Connecticut River Watershed Council.

Classroom supported education programs have been initiated for the year. Both the Connecticut River Salmon Association and the Trout Unlimited Atlantic Salmon Egg Rearing Program (ASERP) have conducted annual teacher training. The Connecticut River Coordinator's Office Website has been updated to include the ASERP workbook which contains material and resources for teachers. We currently have 30 schools participating in Massachusetts and 62 schools in Connecticut. An additional number of schools will be participating in Vermont and New Hampshire.

Seventy-three people have registered for the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission Research Forum scheduled for February 9, 2005 at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Office in Hadley, MA. The agenda includes 11 presentations with speakers covering topics that range from fish health to the impacts of global climate change.

The Administrative Report, a summary of CRASC finances and correspondence, was also provided.

**Discussion:**

Mr. MacCallum inquired whether the CRASC letter to the Director was helpful. Mr. Marvin Moriarty indicated that it was both timely and helpful, and he expressed his appreciation to the Commission for their effort. Subsequently, Mr. MacCallum extended an offer to provide similar assistance in the future, as needed.

Mr. Menard motioned to accept the report. Mr. Eric Palmer seconded the motion and the report was accepted.

### **3. Report of the Technical Committee Chair**

Mr. Jay McMenemy provided the following report:

#### **White River National Fish Hatchery**

The U.S. Forest Service/Green Mountain National Forest offered the USFWS \$32,000, through a cooperative agreement, to maintain both egg/fry production and future brood stock production at White River NFH. The USFWS could not commit to the offer because of the uncertainties of the federal budget. In the meantime the USFS has provided the USFWS funding for three seasonal positions to assist with care of the 8.6 million green eggs being incubated. Additional egg care assistance is being provided to White River by other program cooperators including NHFG, VTFW, and Cronin NSS. PIT tagging of the 2004 year-class of brood stock was completed in December.

The fry allocation meeting is scheduled for March 9.

#### **Pittsford National Fish Hatchery**

The proposed closure of the Pittsford Hatchery has been postponed at least through the end of the fiscal year and hopefully indefinitely. However, no eggs for production of 2007 Connecticut River smolts have been sent to Pittsford for incubation and rearing apparently due to the uncertainty of the budget situation. Smolt production is highly desirable for the program and Pittsford has demonstrated the capability to produce high quality two-year smolts. The Technical Committee recommends that sufficient eggs or fry for smolt production be sent to Pittsford as soon as feasible. Should the facility be closed before 2007, parr can always be stocked out. This decision needs to be made no later than the fry allocation meeting.

A total of 75,000 smolts will be stocked from the Pittsford National Fish Hatchery this spring split between the Farmington River and the mainstem Connecticut River. Transport will be provided by CTDEP, MAFW, and NHFG.

#### **Kelts**

Sea-run brood stock at Cronin National Salmon Station, which had been vaccinated against furunculosis, had their water test positive for the disease. The Lamar Fish Health Unit reviewed the situation and concluded that the sample had been contaminated with water from the control tank. The vaccinated fish did not display any symptoms of furunculosis and the water tested positive at a low level only the one time. The recommendation was that the sea-run brood stock be shipped to North Attleboro for reconditioning because there was no more fish health risk than usual. Because of concerns of the hatchery manager and the budget situation, the issue was to be decided by the Regional Office. No decision has been made and in the meantime, reconditioning has been started at Cronin. Cronin could maintain the kelts with existing staff and student volunteers for only the cost of food (\$1K) if they can't be transferred to North Attleboro.

Kelts are essential to the program both for production of genetically desirable eggs and to boost the numbers of females contributing to the egg bank in years of low sea-run returns. The Technical Committee recommends that resources be made available to maintain the kelts either at North Attleboro or at Cronin.

#### **SOFA**

Phil Herzig of the Sunderland Office of Fisheries Assistance (SOFA) left for a new job. We are expecting that his position will not be refilled and the station operational budget will be eliminated. Among other duties, Phil transported fry from White River to the southern part of the basin, transported shad from Holyoke to the Ashuelot River and to Vernon, and collected blueback herring for transport to the Ashuelot and Westfield rivers.

SOFA has a fry transport truck and two shad trucks that are potentially available to cooperators. Costs of gasoline and routine maintenance are issues that need to be addressed. We are hopeful that the USFWS can cover these costs so fry stocking, shad trucking and herring transport commitments can be met in the absence of this key position.

The Technical Committee requests that staff at Cronin National Salmon Station be made available to haul fry prior to the commencement of the adult run. The Conte Lab has offered to assist with both shad trucking and fry transport to the extent that they can. Remaining fry trips and shad trucking trips will need to be absorbed by the states. The goal is to transport at least 1000 shad to the Ashuelot and at least 1500 to the Vernon pool. NHFG and MAFW will attempt to cooperatively collect herring for transport to the Westfield and Ashuelot.

**Research Proposals**

The Technical Committee agreed to revise the identified priority research proposals included in last year's CRASC funding proposal and shop them around for possible funding. The CTDEP Supplemental Environmental Project Fund is one possible source of funding. The acoustic smolt tracking and pound net study will be submitted for consideration at the February meeting of the fund advisory committee. Because this is state money it could potentially be used as non-federal match to leverage additional funding for these research projects.

**Research Forum**

The Connecticut River Migratory Fish Research Forum will be held February 9 at the USFWS Regional Office. Twelve presentations are planned on topics including the results from the first year of smolt sampling for genetic marks, smolt migration, eel migration, and shad passage.

**Fish Passage:****Holyoke**

Construction of the fish passage changes at Holyoke as a result of the new license continue to be on schedule for completion in advance of the spring fish passage season. The Technical Committee is planning a site visit for late March to view the new facilities. Of particular interest is the new shad trucking facility, which should greatly reduce operational constraints on shad trucking.

**Turners Falls Upstream Passage**

Northeast Generation Services has provided a plan for 2005 modifications and study at Turners Falls with a proposed target of 2008 for a new Gatehouse ladder entrance and 2009 for a new facility at Cabot. We will be providing comments on their proposal and are hoping that the schedule can be accelerated.

**Fiske Mill Dam**

The first dam on the Ashuelot had been planned for FERC license surrender and removal. Unfortunately the project has been sold to a new owner who is continuing hydro operation. A denial ladder will be constructed.

**USGEN**

USGEN New England (formerly PGE and New England Power) is in bankruptcy and has sold their projects to Trans Canada (Fifteen Mile Falls, Wilder, Vernon, Deerfield River) except for Bellows Falls, which will be sold to the town of Rockingham. All license conditions will remain in effect, but this may make things more complicated for fish passage operation.

**Discussion:**

Mr. Paul Pajak noted that the USFWS Regional Office had recently approved the transfer of kelts from the Richard Cronin National Salmon Station to the North Attleboro National Fish Hatchery, and it was generally agreed that production activities were being conducted as they were last year.

Mr. MacCallum asked about the status of the smolt program. He was informed that the production program was moving forward without interruption except that the 2007 year-class currently remains at the White River NFH. This action has been taken to maximize management flexibility in the absence of either an FY2005 or 2006 budget (both of which are expected in February). If inadequate funding is allocated in FY2006, it is expected that production will be consolidated at the White River NFH. However, Mr. Geiger indicated that the USFWS would not jeopardize the FY2006 year class regardless of the budget situation. Mr. Moriarty assured the Commissioners that there would continue to be smolt production though the production facility might be an issue.

Mr. Gephart commented on the fact that the Commission had established ad hoc advisory committee to ensure production of a quality smolt at the Pittsford NFH. The committee is comprised of managers, fish health professionals, physiologists, and fish behavior specialists who have worked together to address concerns associated with smolt production. Their efforts have assisted the hatchery in the production of a very fine year class in 2005. Moreover, the Pittsford NFH has a demonstrated track record and is the preferred location for smolt production. However, if production is moved to the White River NFH in the future, he recommended the use of a similar advisory committee to ensure successful smolt production there.

When asked if the USFWS had the capacity to produce smolts at the White River NFH, Mr. Pajak indicated some uncertainty due to the fact that the Lake Champlain Program would also be moved there. There would be a need to fully assess the capability of the station.

Mr. MacCallum asked whether federal fish transport vehicles would be available for use by the cooperators. Mr. Moriarty replied that this would be possible if there were appropriate agreements in place. He also indicated that he thought the USFWS could cover the cost of fuel and maintenance for these vehicles (estimated at about \$6K).

Mr. MacCallum commented on the fact that he endorsed the Technical Committee effort to develop and seek funding for research proposals which address the limiting factors in salmon restoration.

Mr. Pajak and Mr. Steve Roy clarified the status of the USFS funding offer. The USFS has agreed to provide \$15K to the White River NFH to assist in staffing as needed to manage egg and fry production. The USFWS has, in turn, hired two seasonal employees at the hatchery with a third hire anticipated in the spring. The USFS will provide an additional \$17K contingent upon the USFWS maintaining full production at the facility. Mr. Moriarty expressed his appreciation to Mr. Roy for this assistance. Mr. MacCallum proposed that the Coordinator draft a letter of thanks from the Commission to Mr. Roy's supervisor. Mr. Charlie Thoits moved to approve the proposal. Mr. Decker seconded the motion and the proposal was approved.

Mr. Menard motioned to accept the report. Mr. Thoits seconded the motion and the report was accepted.

#### **4. Update and Discussion on Funding and Program Operations**

Mr. Moriarty provided a status update on the USFWS budget:

The USFWS Region 5 has not received the FY2005 appropriation yet – it is expected by the end of February

The Fisheries Program is currently projecting an estimated deficit of \$2M in FY2005 – compared to a \$1.6M deficit in 2004

The deficit is largely due to the erosion of core funding including unexpected nationally-determined pay increases in 2005

The Region 5 request to the USFWS Director to reduce fish production has not been approved so production levels are still at the 2004 level

Absent fiscal relief, the Fisheries Program will be operating in deficit in July or August

The Regional Director has committed to keeping the Pittsford and Nashua NFHs open in 2005 but this comes at a cost to Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance

The level of Regional discretion used to resolve the deficit in 2004 is not available in 2005 because the other programs (Ecological Services and Refuges) are now facing the same sort of fiscal concerns and also require relief

The good news is that \$4M in deferred maintenance funding has been made available nationally, as base funding

The bad news is that we need the deferred maintenance funding and we will need to work with Congress to replenish that fund in the future

Congress also added \$885K nationally to help out but only in 2005 – Region 5 will receive \$144K from this allocation

The bottom line is that the fundamental problem remains and, even with the expected fixes, Fisheries is still facing a \$500K deficit in 2005

Not too optimistic about the President's 2006 budget which is expected to be released in early February

Hope to have more information to share at the Northeast Director's meeting

In the mean time, we need to be innovative to continue the program in the short term and we need help from our partners to address the situation in the long term

## Discussion:

Mr. MacCallum noted that the CRASC initiative has been included in the International Federal Budget Committee recommendations for the past few years and he offered to address the issue of the erosion of core USFWS funding at the International Federal Budget Committee meeting in February.

Mr. Moriarty responded to a question about the funding status for fishway engineers noting that this function was funded nationally by our Denver Engineering Office. It happens that Region 5 expertise had been developed and used nationally. The funding was cut a couple of years ago and the positions have since been funded piece meal like everything else. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the majority of the staff is either retired or poised to retire necessitating future capacity building at additional cost.

Mr. Bob Stira indicated that this function was important and indicated that he would and take the message back to Northeast Generation Services and see if there was a corporate interest in supporting Congressional funding for this purpose.

Specific discussion as to how CRASC would support this need was deferred to the next agenda item.

## **5 Congressional Initiative 2005 Discussion**

Mr. Jim Carroll provided the following summary and recommendations:

### Background

The Congressional Initiative Subcommittee members included Mr. Duncan McInnes, NHFG, who was a CRASC Commissioner in direct contact and communication with the Commissioners and Chair of the Subcommittee, Ms. Rowan who as the Coordinator scheduled the meetings, wrote the copy, followed-up with Congressional staff, and documented the results, and Mr. Carroll who represented the private sector and the education program. It has been a learning process. The three have worked very well together and have achieved both recognition and funding (in 2004) for CRASC. Mr. Carroll also acknowledged the role that his brother, Pete Carroll, played in assisting the Subcommittee as an advisor.

### Summary of Effort

The strategy was to (1) develop CRASC recognition at all basin and Washington Congressional Offices; and, (2) support a clean add to the appropriations bill. The first is an ongoing process that has met with some success; the second was successful in 2004 for \$250K. It likely would have resulted in a \$500K appropriation if there had been House support.

In 2005, the Merrimack Program had success with an alternate strategy when the NH delegation supported an earmark to keep the Nashua NFH open. Ultimately, this had a national impact in shifting funding and committing the USFWS to keeping both the Nashua and Pittsford hatcheries open.

### Recommendations:

- Reconstitute the Subcommittee as a permanent arm of CRASC

- Include the Coordinator, an NGO, and appoint a State representative as a replacement for Duncan McInnes

- The State representative on the Subcommittee should serve as Chair

- In selecting subcommittee members, keep in mind that the Subcommittee is selling a change in Congress's behavior toward CRASC, so the individuals need to be persuasive, they need to be someone you can trust, and someone who can be on a long leash

- The Subcommittee provided the CRASC Chair with a list of candidates

- CRASC needs to develop a clear and cohesive strategy and message

- Include a research request as part of the recommendation, like last year – the Technical Committee is developing at least two proposals

- Ask for Senate/House closure to prohibit closure of key facilities

- Present solutions, not problems

Address key contacts like Senators Gregg and Leahy, House and Senate appropriations staff and find a way to neutralize non-supporters  
Diversify the support base by involving additional NGOs  
Travel to DC week of Feb. 21, prior to USFWS visits in March  
Plan for membership succession on the Subcommittee

Discussion:

Mr. MacCallum thanked Mr. Carroll observing that he had a lot to offer. Mr. MacCallum expressed appreciation for Mr. Carroll's input here as well as in the school programs. He said that there is no doubt that Mr. Carroll has made a major contribution to better inform and education the basin's Congressional delegation. Mr. MacCallum also noted that it is difficult to plan for the future and provide continuity for the Subcommittee. This is a process that can't be keyed to individuals but that must take advantage of every available opportunity.

Mr. Bob Jones moved to reconstitute the group as the Congressional Liaison Subcommittee. Mr. Decker seconded the motion and all approved.

Mr. Menard motioned to appoint Mr. Lee Perry, NHFG Commissioner, Ms. Rowan, and Mr. Carroll to the Congressional Liaison Subcommittee. Mr. Thoits seconded the motion and all approved.

There was additional discussion on the tactics. The CRASC provided the Congressional Liaison Subcommittee with a great deal of leeway on formulating and adjusting the strategy to fit the circumstances. It was generally agreed that a clean add recommendation was preferred. However, a short-term earmark prohibiting certain closures, as in the case with Nashua NFH, for example, may have helped to draw attention to the issues with core funding and may become the impetus for a national fix. This sort of fix is troublesome and shouldn't be implemented without consideration of ancillary impacts which may be negative. The Congressional Liaison Subcommittee was encouraged to commence immediately and to keep the Commissioners apprised in the process.

**6. Other Business**

Mr. Geiger noted that the USFWS had received a petition to list the American eel under the Endangered Species Act. He indicated that he would keep the Commissioners apprised of developments as that process unfolds.

Mr. Menard motioned to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Thoits seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 1:50 p.m.

**Attendance**

Janice Rowan	USFWS
Wayne MacCallum	MDFW
Marvin Moriarty	USFWS
Charles Thoits III	NH Public Sector
Scott Decker	NHFG
Tom Menard	MA Public Sector
Paul Pajak	USFWS
Caleb Slater	MDFW
Jaime Geiger	USFWS
Jim Carroll	CRSA
Steve Roy	USFS
Gabe Gries	NHFG
Bob Stira	Northeast Generation Services
Alia Hinds	UMASS Intern
Darleen Cutting	USFWS
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Eric Palmer	VTFW
Bob Jones	CT Public Sector
Steve Gephard	CTDEP